

CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scene
\$10 year...505-5th Ave, NY 17 NY...MU 2-0326...T.M. Kraus, Editor

NYC New Theatre -Weekly Views

Camino Real-National 3/19/53. Though their daily colleagues had given the Tennessee Williams play, staged by Elia Kazan and presented by Crawford, Chrysler and Reiner, a split decision, weekly aisle sitters favored the con side. Keating, Cue, and Gibbs, New Yorker, recommended play for a most stimulating evening of theatre. Cue critic-editor admitted that play is often harsh and bitter, it may repel you, certain of its flights of muzzy language and overdressed platitudinizing will irritate, but he is convinced playgoers will find it a most fascinating concoction. After noting that neither he nor playwright Williams is sure if his play is a lucid criticism of our society, Gibbs pointed out that fine cast, outstanding direction and production made for interesting evening. Trade paper reporters would buy none of it. Except for high plane intellectuals Francis, Billboard is sure the public will take the same dim view of the proceedings as he did. Thoroughly baffling, unpleasant show is how it seemed to Hobe, Variety. Cast headed by Frank Silvera, Eli Wallach and Jo V an Fleet were complimented by Hobe. Time man panned it because play which is often dull and more often arty, exposes decadence with decadent means. Newsweek aisle sitter described it as a pretentious and misbegotten mixture of realism and fantasy, of masque and morbid morality. Shipley, WEVD New Leader, pointed out to Williams that plays of symbols and ideas must have a story to equal drama. Playwright urged by critic to read Dante's Divine Comedy, which did for its time what Williams murkily fails to do for us. WCBS Leonard summed up his con viewpoint by noting play left him stimulated in the head but untouched in the chest.

My 3 Angels-Morosco 3/11/53. Majority of weekly drama reviewers enjoyed Sam and Bella Spewack comedy based on French play by Albert Husson. Most admitted they found it on the thin side at times, but fine acting by Walter Slezak, Jerome Cowan and others in Subber, Allen, Thomson production, staged by Jose Ferrer made for an entertaining evening. Nathan, Journal American, and Keating, Cue, dissented. Former thought Winchell Smith-John E Hazzard comedy Turn to the Right, produced in NY 36 years ago, was funnier play on same topic. Nathan also panned cast and direction. Keating thought show would be a gay, Gallic creampuff, judging from opening scenes, but after that the amusement declines and leads to nowhere. Christian Science Monitor, critic notes that without expert direction and playing there would be nothing to comedy, but this production has been turned into a fine actors' play. Trade paper critics agreed that script was fragile, but also found it a thoroughly enjoyable show. Except for fact that a few of the French idioms don't translate too well into English, Gibbs, New Yorker marked it as one of the brighter events of the season. Newsweek man didn't think adapters were completely successful, but show is still a genuine pleasure. Time judge rated result a very enjoyable evening of the gloriously improbable.

Out of Town Theatre Briefs

Something exceptional is how Waters, Variety's Philadelphia mugg, rates the new Cole Porter-Abe Burrows musical, presented by Feuer-Martin. Except for cutting 45 minutes out of show, tradepaper critic had no complaints. Porter score rated as a terrific job, while lyrics have plenty of Gallic spice and flavor. Lilo, new French singer, is highlight of cast, though reviewer noted her accent makes it difficult to understand some of the worthier Porter lyrics.

 ' Off Broadway '

Touring Players, group which has traveled country since 1947, makes local debut at Theatre de Lys April 4 with Which Way Is Home, written by Ellen Violet, and derived from the works of Stephen Vincent Benet, Gertrude Stein and Mark Lodge... Originals Only present "3", which is a program of dramatic readings from Shakespeare, Sheridan and Wilde... Circle in Square run of Summer and Smoke closes April 5. The Grass Harp is next... Angelic Doctor, at Blackfriars' has been extended 5 weeks... Love in Two Moods, program of one actors, will be presented at Newspaper Guild Club by Journeymen April 24, 25, 30 & May 1... Barnard College opened \$150,000 fund campaign to modernize theatre... Freyde Marshall as Hagar in Equity Community Theatre production of Mamba's Daughters at Dewitt Center, Bronx, highly rated by Atkinson, Times, Rice, Post and Vene, Variety. Times man noted that he couldn't judge show as whole fairly from dress rehearsal in empty hall. Post editor hailed discovery of Marshall as a rare new acting talent, which makes the whole ELT project worthwhile.

 ' Summer Notes '

Music in the Air will open Lambertville, NJ, Music Circus June 5... Newport, NJ, Music Circus opens June 29 with Show Boat... Robert Lenn and William Whiting have leased Provincetown for 20 weeks and will begin the second season of American Lyric Theatre June 1... Sara Stamm will operate Newport, RI, Theatre and Somerset, Mass, Theatre, both opening June 22... 13th Annual Summer Theatre Directory published by Leo Shull, 1953 Supplement to John Effrat Blueprint for Summer Theatre issued... Saratoga Melloy Fair, NY will present 10 week season of musical revivals starting in June... 6 new outdoor dramas will be presented in summer 1954, predicts Kermit Hunter, author of 3 Southern outdoor dramas.

 ' Broadway Gripe Box '

' Send Gripes '
 ' Any Subject '
 ' Book Gifts '

PRIZE WINNER: Press agents and theatre writers who misspell actors' names are twin enemies of veteran stage manager. If player gives the press agent the wrong data on names of shows, etc, it is duty of flack to get it right. This gripe applies to programs and press releases.

More praise is due people who are excellent actors who are not "ill" than is due and accorded those who actually possess a condition which is wrongly called "talent" by critics, explains a press agent. Often what is considered to be a great performance is nothing more or less than some acting talent, plus a thyroid or glandular condition, he believes.

If Watts, Post, "Mystery Correspondent" is such a theatre lover, asks an actor in a NY musical, how come he hasn't gone to a new show in 25 years?

Gripes, general and specific, are invited. Identity will be held confidential, but each letter must be signed. Best gripe of week, in opinion of editor, will receive a gift of a new theatre book. Critics' rebuttals are also invited.

 ' Theatre Book Notes '

Harper & Bros will publish Ethel Barrymore's memoirs... New American Library has published paper bound edition of Tobacco Road... University of Indiana press will publish Series I & II of "From the Modern Repertoire" by Bentley, New Republic... Fireside Theatre Book Club coming selections include Time of the Cuckoo in April and Dial M For Murder in March.

JENNY, EQUITY & CO...Open letter from Ben Hecht to Actors Equity Council which forced his 9 year old daughter Jenny Hecht to withdraw from cast of Mid-Summer, reveals that parent plans to sue the union for its action. Youngster was ousted by union after complaint signed by all but 2 of cast had been made to Council. Details were never made public. Father's letter notes that he will bring case, which had been dropped by Council, to law because of slander and libel spoken by Equity when it disposed of the case. Letter points out that a union investigator would have found out that the acclaim accorded Jenny and Geraldine Page resulted in rest of cast becoming disgruntled. This led to cursing backstage, the ordering of stage door left open, and nasty remarks made about 9 year old on radio program interviews. Cast also got Jenny's bow at curtain eliminated. Union deputy Robert Emmett told Times reporter that troupe was surprised and shocked by accusations and allegations released to press by girl's parents. Actor noted that cast is more mindful of her welfare than her parents. Sobol, Journal American, learned that charges listed included being late for cues, late for rehearsals, insubordination and interference by her mother.

COLUMN TIME...Two's Company investors, which lost \$300,000 may sue Bette Davis, Winchell Hears...First office building with built in theatre will be erected on 42nd St, predicts Kilgallen...Brilliant star of a Broadway hit weeps in her dressing room and talks of quitting, whispers Wilson...

"W+" TOWN CANCELS...Robert Fryer, producer of Wonderful Town announced that he has canceled the April 8 performance. McCord, Herald Tribune, points out that act is in compliance with wishes expressed by Sullivan, News, who stated that "leftist sheet" was taking over performance as benefit. Publication, McCord reports, is "National Guardian" which purchased 300 seats for April 8 performance. National Council of Freedom From Censorship, an affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, has protested to the producer. Elmer Rice in an open telegram noted that such an action raises amazing possibilities that theatregoers must now pass political tests setup by the producers.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Bentley, New Republic, fans complained Watts, Post, crack at being unable to read magazine critic's "In Search of Theatre" book with heaviest mail daily reviewer has received in years...Camino Real may be the first real bop play, suggests Sylvester, News...Investment in Oklahoma has paid back \$50,000, Francis, Billboard learned from press agent Nat Dorfman...Axiom for advanced theatrical thinkers posted by Burr, Playbill: Anything that forces spectator to realize that he merely watching a play inevitably breaks the illusion, which is the primary aim of the theatre.

FILM OMEN...Week without any film openings is first Winston, Post, can recall in 16 years. Public is partly to be blamed for this arrival of a new epoch. In general, the public has gone to see that which it ought not to see, and it has stayed away from that which it ought to have seen. The result is not enough health in the right box offices.

NYC Theatre News

Atkinson, Times, to cover London theatre till May. Funke, to sub...New Faces closed, moves to Boston April 6 for 3 weeks, then for 12 week strawhat tour...Horses in Midstream moved opening date from April 16 to April 2...Beatrice Lillie missed 1 performance due to laryngitis...Dorothy Patten has succeeded Kay Hammond, On Borrowed Time.

I Confess-Paramount 3/21/53. Alfred Hitchcock's new Warner thriller filed in Quebec judged one of his best in recent tries by NY critics. Two dissented, while 1 filed actual rave. 4 stars rated by Cameron, News, for film starring Montgomery Clift and Anne Baxter. Quinn, Mirror, headed majority who commented that film was more intriguing than his others, Winston, Post, agreed, but added that continuing flaw in his films is the lack of heart, a reluctance to show emotions or induce large amounts of it in audience. Cook, World Telegram & Sun, believed that material he chose not up to his standard, but that he did best he could. Times and Herald Tribune critics panned show. Former marked it off as suspenseless script that tends to drag, sag and generally grow dull, while latter blamed fact that film is only a fair wine of noted director's vintage. Reason is that characters are handcuffed by their own honor and convictions.

Call Me Madam -Rox 3/23/53. Solid raves for film version of Ethel Merman musical, with the stage star in full command. Most insisted that she is better on the screen than on the stage. There should be no need for 35 pictures as long as performers like her around, lauded Crowther, Times. Guernsey, Herald Tribune, compared her performance to a double magnum of dry champagne. Delightful, lovely, demermerman film, praised Kameron, News. Pelwick, Journal American, settled for word terrefic, while Winston, Post, saw it as Merman in high gear. Rest of cast in 20th Century Fox film okayed, but star stole the show.

Salome-Rivoli 3/24/53. Slight majority of NY daily critics panned Columbia's expensive, lush version of Biblical tale. They admitted that Rita Hayworth never looked more beautiful. On other hand News, Mirror and Journal American reviewers rated film highly. Cameron, News, gave it 3 stars, complimenting large cast. Cook, WT&S, noted that spectacle, acting, writing and detail may recall glories of Quo Vadis.

Crowther, Times, listed it as a lush conglomeration of historical pretenses, make believe, pseudo religious ostentation and just plain insinuated sex. Winston, Post, marked it as the kind of film he would not be caught dead at, though he wouldn't be surprised it is a money maker. Like other films of its kind, points out Guernsey, Herald Tribune, it tries to express enormity of ideas and significances of Bible epic in terms of extravaganzas.

Naked Spur-State 3/25/53/ Unanimous approval greeted MGM "Western" starring James Stewart, Janet Leigh and Robert Ryan. Most agreed that it is one of best Westerns made, and contender for prizes as general film as well. Pihodna, Herald Tribune, feels this film brings Westerns into their own. Film has inspiration of solid writing and satiric direction by Anthony Mann. Hale, News, enjoyed it very much, but noted it may have been more realistic if everyone but Stewart died at end of chase. Thirer, Post, listed it as a rugged outdoor drama, taut, tense, suspenseful, replete with good craftsmanship in all directions.

By The Light of the Silvery Moon. More than 3/26/53. 8 outright rave reviews, 3 mild pro reviews, and 1 con verdict filed on Warner technicolor musical featuring Doris Day and Gordon MacRae. News, Mirror, Journal American film raters greeted it as entertaining, wholesome cinema fare. Times, Herald Tribune, and Post critics could find nothing to complain about, nor anything to rave about what they considered tailor made production. Crowther, Times, did not that actually plot had little to do with original Penrod story it is supposed to be based on. Cook, WT&S, was more bitter. Apparent corn with plenty of old jokes, he panned.

' Meet The Critic-Norman Nadel '

NY drama critics who think they are overworked when they must attend several openings in a week should consider themselves lucky, Norman Nadel told "Critical Digest." Columbus Citizen drama critic, who recently chaperoned 250 theatre fans from Columbus on his paper's 2nd annual theatre junket, stated that some day he would like to "retire" to job of NY critic.

Theatre junket gave fans full week of playgoing in NYC, plus transportation and hotel room for \$99.50. Group arrived by special NY Central coaches. They saw Wish You Were Here, Love of 4 Colonels, Dial M For Murder, Cinerama, Radio City Music Hall Show and Wonderful Town. At latter musical, which details life of two sisters in NYC from Columbus, the group from Columbus reacted and enjoyed every mention to their home town, the critic reported.

Drama coverage is only part of his job. Writing a daily column, coverage of all drama, film, musical events, plus editing of large Sunday entertainment department are a few of the chores that make Nadel envy the life of a NY critic.

It was while a freshman at Denison University, Grandville, Ohio, that Nadel first wrote criticism. At that time he filed two reviews on every show, one for the local weekly and one for the college paper. After college he was editor of several suburban weeklies, where he did everything but print the paper. In 1939 he joined the Columbus Citizen as Make Up Editor, and in 1940 he was made radio columnist and assistant theatre editor.

Though he don't have time for active music participation at the present, the critic-editor has a wide background in music. At his home town of Rochester he played in the Eastman School summer concert orchestra. At college he lead his own band, as he did for a time in the army from 1942-1946. A founder of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, he played first trombone with the group for a time.

The critic's function, as Nadel views it, is to excite interest in worthwhile events. The critic should be a press agent for quality, and should pan items that are not good, he believes. While primary job of critic is to be a reporter, he must be a more perceptive reporter than most. All criticism should be read and written under the assumption, he said, that the critic likes the theatre. If he don't, then he can have no loyalty. If he does, he will be the first to condemn what is bad.

Planning of theatre junkets was suggested by Columbus writer as a perfect method of putting a critic in touch with readers. Being "mother" to 250 citizens of Ohio and neighboring states allows no time for the critic to remain in any ivory tower, he admitted. Nadel is sure that this close contact with what his readers like and want.

Atkinson, Times, and Kerr, Herald Tribune, as well as other critics have many readers out of town, Nadel pointed out. He doubts if NY critics realize their influence in playgoing choices of out of towners.

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' Critics Choice of Current Events '

Critics Choice summarizes the views of 50 NYC & LA daily and weekly critics on current Broadway attractions under headings "Raves," "Mixed" and "Con." Percentages refer to number of NYC daily critics ONLY who recommend item for an entertaining or stimulating evening in the theatre.

THEATRE

RAVES: Beatrice Lillie(1000), Dial M For Murder(1000), Guys and Dolls(1000)
Hazel Flagg(1000), King and I (1000), On Borrowed Time(1000), Mis-
alliance(1000), Mid Summer(1000), Moon Is Blue(1000), Pal Joey(1000),
Porgy & Bess(1000), South Pacific(1000), Wonderful Town(1000)

MIXED: John Brown's Body(714), Fifth Season(714), Fourposter(714), Time of
Cuckoo(571), Time Out for Ginger(571), My 3 Angels(571).

CON: Camino Real(430) Wish You Were Here(287).

FILMS

RAVES: Call Me Madam(1000), Cinerama(1000), Moulin Rouge(1000), Come Back
Little Sheba(1000), Naked Spur(1000), By Light of Silvery Moon(857)

MIXED: Lili(714), Anna (571), I Confess(571)

CON: Salome(430)

' NYC Recommended Dining Spots '

Original Marie's, 140 West 13th, highly recommended by Dewitt, Cue...
L'Armerique, 54th St & 2nd Ave, is kind of place where Dewitt suggests you can
safely close your eyes, jab menu with pencil and come up with something fine.
...Chez Cardinal, 14 East 52nd St, okayed by Cue man for serving about as
superb French food as you could desire...Celeste, 28 West 56, supplying same
fine French-Italian cuisine at lunch it has always had for dinner, notes
Dana, World Telegram & Sun...Singapore, above Winter Garden Theatre on Broad-
way, owes just as much to its new boom in business to Wonderful Town down
stairs, as it does to its fine cuisine and decor, praises Burden, Post...
Le Cheval Blanc, 145 E 45, is a fine small French restaurant run by a nice
hard working couple, reports Dana, WT&S...Mayfair Farms, West Orange, NJ, visited
by WT&S editor, who was very much impressed by the huge dining and dancing
establishment which serves 1 million people yearly.

